

[Interview with O. W. McCuiston]

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Carrie L. Hodges

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TALES OF OLD TIMERS

Interview with O.W. McCuiston

Of Clayton, New Mexico.

"Many was the time," so relates Mr. O.W. McCuiston, one of northeastern New Mexico's earliest settlers, "that I found myself just around a bunch of bushes from the hostile Commanche Indians, they not seeing me and I only seeing them in time to save my scalp."

This tribe of Indians ravaged the herds of horses, and drove [off?] all they could acquire, but left the cattle unmolested. They also found horse flesh more palatable than beef, and in the rides across the country "cow hunting" Mr. McCuiston relates, ". it was a usual sight to see the carcass of a horse that this tribe of Indians had killed and taken the flesh away with them for meat.

He tells of a time he was hunting his stray cattle on the Cimarron River about where the town of Kenton, Oklahoma is now located, that, after he had rounded up a bunch, he hobbled his horse for the night, and cooked all the food left in his pack, leaving a small amount of coffee for breakfast. After eating, he retired for the night, and the next morning all he had for breakfast was his coffee, then on again he rode in quest of wandering cows when he came to where Indians had camped the night before, and near the smoldering

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camp-fire lay the carcass of a colt that had been killed by the Commanche's and robbed of its flesh.

Going on toward his ranch with the cattle that had been rounded up, he passed a ranch home, A woman came running out, calling to him that a band of some seventy-five Indians had just ridden past the ranch, shootin at a man who was herding a bunch of horses.

Mr. McCuistion being alone, could do nothing, so went on his way, searching for more cattle, but on his return trip past this ranch, was told that word had been sent to the soldiers at Fort Union, and they 2 were on their way to give chase to the Indians. However, the soldiers only came as far as the highway near Raton where they learned the Indians were too far in advance of them to be overtaken, driving the herd of horses off with them. The herder of the horses, by some miracle, escaped and Mr. McCuistion said, "this was one of the many times he was near Indians witho'ut their discovering him." [?????]

Mr. McCuistion relates an interesting incident of the early 60's when he was a member of a freighting crew of some thirty wagons going from the Missouri River west, to Salt Lake City, Utah, with a cargo of eatables, composed mostly of bacon and flour.

This wagon train followed the U.S. Stage Line from the Missouri River to California, and was the route fromerly used by the "Pony Express."

Every twelve miles along this line, stage stands were stationed, with relief men, horses and all needed supplies for this express purpose. The stage was drawn with from four to six horses, two men on the drivers seat, with sometimes two U.S. Soldiers riding the top of the vehicle for extra protection of the Government's mail and Express, And always, there were from eight to ten men mounted on horseback, following the stage.

The horses were driven on a dead run between stations, therefore necessitated the best animals obtainable, therby, also running the risk of greater danger of being molested by

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Indians, as they are great lovers of good horses, and to raid one of these trains in transit, would result in a cache of from twelve to sixteen very disireable animals.

When the stage would drive into a stand, other men and horses were quickly substituted, in almost unbelievable time, and on they rushed in a mad run, for another twelve miles to another stand, where the exchange was repeated, and likewise, until the end of the line, which was California to tho'se going west, and the Missouri River to tho'se traveling eastward, there being a stage going in either direction daily.

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A grand and exciting sight, Mr. McCuistion reminisced, as these stages rushed madly by his slowly moving caravan.

It was while his wagon train was on their way, near Julesburg, Nebraska, that his men came on-to the body of a dead Indian. The body had been stripped of clothing and the head was missing. On arriving at the town and upon inquiry, it was learned a band of Indians had raided a stage stand with the view of driving off the horses. The soldiers had given chase and this dead Indian was the result of the fray, the soldiers taking his head back to camp with them.

Horrified at such a deed, I asked, "But why did they cut off his head, that was dreadful," at which Mr. McCuistion smilingly replied, "They [wanted?] to be sure the Indian wouldn't carry it off on his shoulders again." At that remark I was reminded of hearing that an Indian resorted to "playing dead" when surrounded by enemies, thinking there-by, to [make?] his escape.

He relates another episode when he, together with two other men had been down south on Carizzo Creek hunting cattle and were returning home [to?] the Palo [Planco?] Ranch at Kiowa Springs, when they met a band of Ute [Indians?] out hunting for a Mexican who had killed an Indian boy of their tribe. They were infuriated, and were giving the country a

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thorough search, hoping to find the Mexican. The men had seen nothing of the killer, so went their way.

That night, the Indians also, arrived at Mr. McCuiston's ranch still in search of the Mexican. The band stopped some distance from the house and the Chief went alone to the house to talk to Mr. McCuiston, who gave them a beef which they butchered and ate.

The Indians built a large bonfire and held a war dance over the body of the boy killed by the Mexican. This dance took place in front of Mr. McCuiston's house and lasted all night. When daylight came, the dancing ceased and the Indians went on their way, the slayer of their boy still roaming at large.

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Mr. McCuiston delights in telling of these past experiences and the Ute Tribe of Indians always found in him, a friend.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Interview, O.W. McCuiston, September 18, 1936.